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SUBJECT: UNAMI ELECTIONS PREPARATIONS

Classified By: Acting Deputy Political Counselor Elisa Catalano for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On March 16, UNAMI election advisors Sandra Mitchell and Richard Gee apprised representatives of the diplomatic community of the status of UNAMI's elections assistance programs. Sandra Mitchell broke down the assistance into two tracks -- political and technical. On the political front, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is on its fourth draft of an election law. She said the PMO's two objectives are holding provincial elections in 2008 and moving from a closed-list to an open-list system. The PMO has requested research on methods to ensure female representation on the provincial councils. The new draft will also address internally displaced persons (IDPs) voting.

The PMO plans to finalize the draft and submit it to the Council of Representatives (CoR) as early as next week. Mitchell stated the PMO and the CoR understand that an election law must be passed no later than early May to hold provincial elections in 2008. On the technical side, the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) submitted a budget of USD 415 million. Gee pointed out that the CoR needed to act quickly to approve the budget so that IHEC could begin procurement procedures. UNAMI is vetting the remaining candidates for eight Governorate Electoral Office directors and will submit those names to the CoR around March

¶25. Gee also mentioned IHEC received over 130,000 applications for voter registration staff positions. UNAMI's hard-driving approach is positioning the GOI to reach its provincial elections in 2008 goal. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On March 16, UNAMI election advisors Sandra Mitchell and Richard Gee apprised representatives of the diplomatic community of the status of UNAMI's elections assistance programs. Mitchell described their approach as focusing on two tracks -- political and technical. On the political side, UNAMI is assisting the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in drafting election legislation. (Note: It has already reached out to the USAID drafting team arriving this week for information on different methods to ensure female representation on provincial councils. End Note.) The PMO's two goals are to hold provincial elections in 2008 and to move from a closed-list to an open-list system. Because of this, the PMO realizes that district-based voting would not be possible in this election because of the complexities involved. The GOI will not change district boundaries for the same reason. The PMO is considering the possibility of limiting the term of the provincial councils to two years for this election cycle only, so that a district-based election system can be created for future provincial councils, which would then serve four-year terms.

¶3. (C) Mitchell stated the PMO wanted to get away from the Saddam-era voting method of voters selecting a number of candidates equal to the number of provincial seats, so the new law may limit the voter to selecting one candidate only. This has the potential to reduce the chance of minority parties winning seats on any council. Mitchell has mentioned

in the past the possibility of reserving seats for minority candidates, and this may be included in the PMO's final draft. As for female representation, the PMO is reviewing options which include reserved seats and re-ordered lists. The re-ordered list system, used in the Balkans and Jordan, removes a percentage of male candidates who won seats (in Iraq's case, probably 25%) and replaces them with female candidates. This could be controversial, as women who win a few hundred votes could be replacing men who win thousands of votes. The other sensitive issue is IDPs voting. The PMO draft will have IDPs voting at special centers in their place of displacement for councils in their place of origin. The PMO is still discussing the types of identity documents that would be acceptable to prove place of origin. There has been no discussion of refugee voting. The final draft is scheduled to be delivered to the CoR as early as next week. Both the PMO and the CoR understand an election law must be passed in early May to hold elections in 2008.

¶4. (C) Technical preparations have focused on IHEC, which has issued regulations for codes of conduct and technical procedures. They include: 1) code of conduct for election boards; 2) internal rules of procedure; 3) complaint procedures; and 4) election observer procedures. The judiciary has already set up an election complaints appeal panel. In addition, it is working closely with the Ministry of Migration to update the IDP data base. The MOM is keen to assist because it hopes to use the updated voter registry to clean up its own IDP lists. IHEC has also submitted a budget request, including USD 415 million for voter registration, provincial elections, regions formation referenda (if necessary) and constitutional referenda (if necessary). IHEC commissioners told UNAMI they are receiving positive signals from the CoR concerning approval of the budget. However, the Council of Ministers has already questioned the need for that large a budget, and has asked the IHEC to further justify the request. UN Special Representative DeMistura intends to advocate on behalf of the IHEC's budget request, stressing that at least half the funds -- USD 225 million -- is necessary immediately for voter registration activities, including a tender requesting printing and data entry services for the voter registry that went out last week. Gee stated the CoR must act quickly because IHEC must make financial commitments to vendors in the next three to four weeks, and delays in allocating a budget will negatively impact the preparations timeline (Note: The IHEC Finance Committee has already denied tendering an award to support voter registration data entry activities due to lack of a budget. End Note)..

¶5. (C) Gee described UNAMI assistance as transitioning from capacity building to preparation for elections. UNAMI received over 1,100 applications for the eight remaining Governorate Electoral Office (GEO) director positions, of which a little over 800 met the minimum qualifications. An international team based in Amman vetted the list and the leading candidates were invited to Baghdad for interviews by another international panel at the UNAMI compound. UNAMI will submit to the CoR eight to ten candidates for each position. The CoR will select five names from each list to submit to the IHEC, which will choose a director for each of the eight remaining GEOs. UNAMI has completed the Baghdad and Ninewa lists, and will now begin the Wasit list. The process will be completed by March 25. UNAMI is also assisting IHEC to develop the logistics for transporting voter registry materials to the 550 voter registration sites. Gee happily noted that IHEC received over 130,000 applications for the 6,500 open voter registration staff positions. UNAMI's next challenge is to work with the Public Outreach section of IHEC to improve its performance.

¶6. (C) Comment: Earlier this year, UNAMI was reluctant to push the Iraqis on holding provincial elections in 2008. It believed the IHEC was ill-prepared for elections and the capacity-building assistance UNAMI was providing would take time to be effective. Now that momentum has built up for 2008 provincial elections, UNAMI has redoubled its efforts, assisting the PMO to draft a well-thought out election law

and pushing IHEC to make necessary decisions on budget and procedures to facilitate the election process. UNAMI's hard-driving approach is positioning the GOI to reach its provincial elections in 2008 goal. End Comment.
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